

Challenge Accepted!



With her head in the sky, the gospel in her hands and her feet on the ground.

DIVINE WORD PUBLICATIONS



Victims

Winer

Challenge Accepted

by

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FOREWORD

The prodigious development of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate may turn out to be one of the marvels of this century. Founded by Father Louis Marie Parent, O.M.I., and under the special protection of His Excellency Joseph Romeo Gagnon, Bishop of Edmundston, New Brunswick, the group which is now a secular institute in formation has increased from seven members in 1952 to one thousand in 1960.

The growth of the potential institute is as marvelous as the person whom God has chosen to found it. Father Parent is filled with the fire of love and zeal for souls and the marvelous development of the group is due largely to his example, his tireless work, his enthusiasm and his great understanding of persons. Another important factor is the confidence and the encouragement which ecclesiastical authorities and the clergy have shown towards the Oblates.

Based on the Apostolic Constitution, *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, issued by the late Pius XII in 1947 the framework of this potential secular institute is built along a family type of life and it uses modern means both for its apostolic activity and for the formation of its members. An interesting method of

formation, for instance, is the use of tape recordings. Conferences are recorded both in French and in English and are circulated throughout all the Oblate houses in the world. In this way all the Oblates receive the same spiritual formation. Apart from this, plus monthly days of recollection and an annual retreat, most of the training is given on an individual basis. This is done largely through the interview that the Oblate aspirant, probationer and professed, must have with the directress each week. The interview is informal but thorough. It is really a sister to sister chat revolving around the Rule and whatever else may have an effect on the Oblate way of life.

But what is the Oblate way of life like? What is the Rule? What are the qualities necessary to become a member of a secular institute? What is a secular institute? How does it compare with religious Orders? These and many other questions regarding secular institutes in general and regarding the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate will be answered in the following pages. We hope that this pamphlet will serve not only as an enlightenment but also as an inspiration to be sowers of the Charity of Christ through Mary—if not officially, at least in practice.

WE AND THE WORLD

*(The Oblate Missionaries of
Mary Immaculate)*

We and the world get along just fine—because we love the world. Believe you me it wasn't love at first sight. Especially not after all the times we had been told how evil the world is. From early childhood most Oblates (that's short for Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate) had been warned of this evil by sincere persons of greater knowledge and experience. The day came when we realized this for ourselves, however. For some this happened when we were younger, for others when we were older. At that time, however, we saw ourselves more clearly than ever before and we saw the world in all its sin, darkness and despair. And guess what we did. We acted like a newborn baby whose first reaction when it sees the world is to cry. We could have cried until we soaked in our own tears. However, another thing that we had learned was to control ourselves and more probably we ended up being just slightly damp. The knowledge was there though and it was impressed deeply in our hearts. Everything that we had been told was true! But now what were we to do? All that the authors of spirituality had writ-

ten about the battle between good and evil zoomed its way to our consciousness and this realization that we were caught in between, gave us a slight attack of claustrophobia. Our knees began to get weak and we felt we had better go into retreat before they would give in and we fell. If it can still be called such, our courage was at its lowest ebb at that very moment. We felt ourselves getting dizzy . . .

And then God who had given us the grace to see all this and who had been supporting us through all of it lifted us slowly, slowly until we were above the world and we could breathe a pure, fresh air. Revived and revitalized by this we opened our eyes and we saw ourselves looking at the world from above—from God's viewpoint.

There was sin all right—plenty of it. The amount and extent was beyond the limits of our imagination. It seemed to be almost everywhere. But on the other hand there was good almost everywhere, too. In some places it was just blazing. And in other places it was like cinders burning out. Our first reaction was to fall in love with the good radiating from the holy. Its loveliness was enchanting. But our second reaction was the stronger one. We wanted to reach out and enkindle those cinders so that they would not die out, so that

they would flame again. This was more than a desire; it was a yearning. We had been given the apostolic spirit. Our former attitude of despair vanished as we saw the undercurrent of good that was not always visible to the human eye. Everywhere there were seeds of grace. The sad part was that so many persons trampled upon them, or neglected them, or rejected them, very often through blindness or ignorance. They could not see, or they could not understand, or they were unable to find out about the value of grace. So they destroyed the seeds or cast them aside as a baby would pass up a \$100 bill for a shiny dime. And we, sinners ourselves, had pity on our fellowmen who disregarded the priceless reality of invisible grace in order to run after balloons of tangible pleasure which, handled once too often, ended up with POOF! Frustration alone remained and the need to run after other kinds of balloons. We yearned to help.

Then we found ourselves on earth again, face to face with human nature, daily routine, suffering, evil. But we were also face to face with the world that God made and in which He is present. We loved the earth and the sky, the trees and the breeze, the sunshine and the rain, the light and the shadow, for we realized that each had

its part to play in glorifying God. We were also face to face with saints and sinners and we loved them both, but in different ways. This is what I meant when I said that we love the world. It is the world that God created. Whatever He does is good and worthy of our respect and love. Evil does not lie in the created thing but in the way that it is used by man. And man himself (whether he be white or black, big or small, rich or poor) who is a creature made unto the image of God is made for good. Surely, therefore, even in the most wicked there lies still a flicker of good. The greatest of sinners is a possible candidate for heaven if he can only repent and amend his life. We asked ourselves; Where would we be if we had grown up in his environment, had had his upbringing, his particular temptations? Where would we be without the grace of God?

But who will approach the sinner? Who will sympathize with his weakness (not his sin)? Who will help him to rise above sin? Who will give him example? Who will be able to contact him? Who will pray and sacrifice for him?

Many of us had thought of helping sinners by becoming religious, i.e., by being a channel of grace for him through a life dedicated to God, through a life of prayer and penance. Some of us had even tried convent life. But strangely

enough something did not click. Either we could not get ourselves to take the step into religious life, or if we had done so, we found that we could not fit in. What could it be that made us yearn so much to remain with our fellowmen? What could it be that prevented us from remaining in a convent?

It was not a lack of faith in the power of a life of prayer and penance. It was not something negative. It was something positive that held us to the world that was forever challenging us to choose between good and evil, the very world that we know to be so tempting at times. Was it that our softened life had led us to despise and reject sacrifice? Had we lost courage before the demands of a life that thrives on total gift of self, generosity, self-forgetfulness? Why couldn't we decide to give ourselves to God? Or why had we failed once the step was taken? And why did we still yearn? Why were we not satisfied with our state in life?

Because God had other plans for us. And in the oddest, strangest, most amazing way each of us found the answer. Yes, God had prepared us for something that would meet all our desires of giving ourselves totally to Him and yet remaining among our fellowmen—right in the world. Those words spoken by Christ two thousand years ago. "To be in the

world but not of it" took on a profound meaning as we discovered the Church's newest form of dedicated life; when we discovered secular institutes.

On February 2, 1947 the late Pope Pius XII issued a document entitled *Provida Mater Ecclesia*. In it he unfolded the development of dedicated life in the Church and climaxed this with the official approval of secular institutes as a true state of perfection. The Constitution defines these institutes as "Societies, whether clerical or lay, whose members, in order to attain Christian perfection and to exercise a full apostolate, profess the evangelical counsels in the world that they may be properly distinguished from other common Associations of the faithful (Part Three, Book II of the Code of Canon Law) are rightly called Institutes, or secular institutes and are subject to the norms of this Apostolic Constitution:"

Perhaps we should not say that something new had been added to the narrow road of perfection, but rather that the way of life of secular institutes which had been conceived by the Holy Spirit and had been growing in the womb of the Church for a period of time had now been born. This newborn which had been studied by Mother Church was not only accepted and loved but it was placed by Her on the road of perfection along

with religious Orders and Communities.

The essence of religious life is the complete dedication. When a person consecrates herself to God, she is returning to Him the greatest gifts which He has given her: life, mind, heart, goods. There is nothing left to give. It does not matter, however, whether this gift is offered by promise, oath, or vow. All that matters is that it is done freely, validly in a group that is recognized officially by the Church. In *Primo Feliciter*, the *Motu Proprio* which came out about one year after the Apostolic Constitution, the Church tells us that "Secular Institutes, even though their members live in the world, still by reason of their full dedication to God and to souls which they profess with the approval of the Church, and by reason of the internal interdiocesan and universal hierarchial organization which they can have in varying degrees, are according to the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* rightly and properly numbered among the states of perfection which are juridically constituted and recognized by the Church". Therefore, since these institutes have this total dedication which is the essential and since they are now recognized by the Church, their members are truly in a state of perfection.

However, in secular institutes, con-

trary to the traditional religious (with a few exceptions) this perfection is to be "exercised and professed in the world". The whole life of their members "ought to be turned towards the apostolate" in the world where they are to be a "modest but efficacious leaven which, working always and everywhere and dispersed among all classes of people from the lowest to the highest, strives by example and in every way to reach out to and permeate all and each, until it so informs the entire mass that the whole is leavened in Christ". Therefore, where members of the religious groups will withdraw from the world and may go out into it only at times, members of secular institutes will never leave it and will even penetrate into it more audaciously, though not presumptuously. In order to fulfill their apostolic mission which is their *raison d'être*, secular institutes must have an organization, a framework that is very flexible so that nothing will hinder their purpose. It is for this reason that their members have much exterior freedom.

c.f. *Motu Proprio*, Pope Pius XII, March 12, 1948.

Exterior freedom, if it is to fulfill its purpose of permitting members to remain in the world and by so doing increase the glory of God, will exact a great deal of interior discipline. This is

why the training is organized in such a way as to develop solid convictions, an energetic interior life and a spirit of apostolate that knows no bounds, that stops at nothing, except sin.

But in order to live such an ideal, members must have the necessary spiritual nourishment and rely only on the grace of God. Without this the vocation would be impossible to live. For although apostolate is a means of sanctification, it must be born of sanctity. If it is to be effective, it must flow from a spiritual life that is filled with vitality. Without this energetic life the vocation would be a deception for apostolate will always be measured by the degree of union with God.

Where do members of secular institutes get this spiritual food, this spiritual life? First of all from the Sacraments, the Mass and all the other means which are at the disposal of all Christians. Moreover, each institute has its own particular rule which must include the basic spiritual exercises.

We, the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate, have a rule which is called the 5.5.5. This is an unusual name for a rule; but it is a unique rule. It consists of three divisions; the *preparation*, the *field of action* and *reparation*.

The first "5" consists of the spiritual

exercises: Daily (1) Mass (2) Thanksgiving (3) Meditation (4) Complete Rosary, meditated; and twice weekly, (5) Visit to the Blessed Sacrament, Spiritual Reading and a Review of the Day. This, of course, is a minimum and all Oblates are encouraged to do more when they can.

The second "5" includes five points of charity that must be lived each day: (1) the remembrance of God once during each hour (2) the absence of all criticism, exterior and interior (3) the absence of all complaint, exterior and interior (4) the acceptance of all acts of devotedness and (5) the avoidance of becoming the cause of a problem by always being an element of peace and joy.

At first sight this may sound quite simple. But look again—and think. How many times did you complain today? How many times did you criticize? Why did it have to rain again... Who put all that salt in the soup... When will those flies stop their jet flights around me... I just can't stand so and so because... Comments like these seem to come from us as if they were inherent to our nature. And yet, they are about the greatest destroyers of charity in the world today. Complaint can bring down the morale of whole groups as well as of individuals. Criti-

cism can ruin reputations, arouse suspicions and cause a great deal of trouble.

But is it possible to stop complaining and criticizing? Yes, with the help of God. His grace will come to us through many different means. However, one of our great helps is our first point, a contact with God each hour. This helps us to get into the habit of thinking of Him a lot more often than that. When we do remember the presence of God we usually ask ourselves: What would Christ do if He were in my place right now? or other similar questions. The fact is that He is there waiting for us to cooperate with Him so that His love may radiate through our acts of patience, forgiveness, kindness...The remembrance of God present in creation, events, others or ourselves is a source of grace that helps us avoid criticism and complaint, be ever ready to accomplish all tasks; and, if we practice those points, we will not be the cause of a problem very often. Actually, these points are fulfilling the very purpose for which they were given: They create an atmosphere in which charity, peace and joy can not only exist but also radiate.

But what happens when a person takes on the responsibility of practicing this rule? What happens when ordinary everyday routine sets in, when we get up in the morning with the feeling that

we wish it were time to go to bed, when human nature keeps on reminding us that we're not angels and that we've got a long way to go before we reach perfection? We fight the fight that has been going on for ages—that between the old man and the new. And normally enough, we sometimes fall, we sometimes fail. Here is where our third "5" comes in to help us make reparation and give us added energy to try again.

This third "5" consists in making five acts of charity among ourselves each day with the intention of repairing for our slips and failures. Five acts of charity daily may seem to be a large order. Actually, it would be if we would concentrate on doing big things. It's foolish to wait for the extraordinary while letting the little, ordinary things go by wasted. Therefore, the acts require that we develop an alertness to the ordinary needs of others and that we fulfill those needs; for instance, opening a door for someone, anticipating a need at meals, shining someone's shoes, giving encouragement. These are within the reach of everyone daily and consequently we find ourselves doing a lot more than five each day. However, we must be sure to count five in order to be attentive to the motive of reparation through charity so that the purpose

for which this was inserted into our rule will be achieved.

These are all fine means of developing a healthy interior life, of working for self-sanctification. But what about the fact that the *raison d'être* for secular institutes is the apostolate in the world. Don't the Oblates leave the world to go live a community life?

First of all, not all the Oblates leave their environment in the world and the fact that some do does not mean that they have withdrawn from it. Actually, they are never separated from the world even for a period of novitiate. Spiritual and professional training are given during the course of the apostolic life itself. The Oblate's formation is derived from the apostolate even in what concerns divine contemplation. Because she must be prepared to face those things in her daily life which could hinder her apostolate, her formal formation period (6 months as an aspirant, 1 year as a probationer and the first 5 years of vows) is spent within a framework of activity that will not keep her away from apostolic life. As *Intern* Oblates, therefore, they do not leave the world; they are merely transferred from one environment to another. As soon as the candidates arrive they are assigned a certain work or they are given the opportunity

to further their professional training. In this way they meet the needs of the Church that could never be met by individuals but that can only be fulfilled by many persons working together. For instance, they will take charge of hospitals, hotels for pilgrims, homes for working girls, clinics; or they will perform services such as teaching, social work, catechetical instructions, cooking, sewing or secretarial. There is no limit to their activities. In order to help the Church effectively they will go wherever Christ has his rights and will perform whatever services they are capable of doing. Education, professional training, aptitudes, experience—all is taken into consideration before placing a person in a permanent profession or work. It is for this reason, to help the Church, that girls leave their home and accept to be sent wherever they are needed. No one would be sent to foreign countries, however, unless she has made a written request in which she presented the reasons why she wants to go and other pertinent information. Another important reason for the Interns is that they safeguard the unity, the development and the spirit of the potential institute.

But not all the Oblates leave their home. Besides meeting the needs of the Church there is another very important

reason for the existence of secular institutes, that of extending the growth of the Mystical Body into all parts of the world. This, in fact, is the very *raison d'être* for secular institutes: a penetration into the world, the channeling of grace to all men while using the professions and legitimate means of the world, while remaining as much as possible like the ordinary lay person. Although the Interns* do penetrate into places where religious are not wanted or where they can make no headway, this mission of sowing grace in the very midst of it all is fulfilled in a special way by the *Extern** Oblate.

** Interns wear a uniform of current style, usually, according to the fashions of the country where they are working. Externs are not allowed to wear the uniform.*

Both Interns and Externs are considered in a state of perfection because their dedication is total and permanent. For both, this is effected through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Both, also, have the very same rule to live. The difference between the two lies in their field of apostolate. The Externs are made to be witnesses of Christ in the midst of it all. Except for temporary contacts such as an annual retreat, they never have to leave their respective lay environment, not even for training, which nevertheless is organized

and complete. They wear makeup and jewelry and live according to their respective levels in society. This requires a personal conviction that is tenacious and an unlimited amount of common sense for in order to be witnesses of Christ wherever they are, they must be deeply conscious of their vocation and use their judgment to live it. Their life is not a bundle of pious practices; they are not a flock of holy holies. They are established in a state of perfection that exacts constantly because it comes from a total dedication and continuously because it is an apostolic one.

Besides the Interns and the Externs there are two other divisions in the Oblate group. These are the Lay Missionaries and the Auxiliaries. Members of these two categories belong to the group in a broad sense, i.e. they are not considered in a state of perfection because their dedication is either not total or not permanent.

The *Lay Missionaries* are not bound through any kind of vow. They offer a few years of their lives to the service of the Church in foreign countries. Before leaving, they receive a certain training, the period of time depending on their experience, abilities and present state of preparedness.

And in order to penetrate into the very core of society, the family, there

are the *Auxiliaries* who are married couples or single persons who promise (not under pain of sin) to live the 5.5.5. with the exception of the spiritual exercises that are reduced to daily Mass and Communion if possible and five decades of the Rosary.

All are essentially apostolic; all have the mission to carry out our motto: Charity of Christ Through Mary; all must be witnesses of Christ in their own environment. What a great privilege-responsibility!

But who can become Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate? Actually there is no particular type of a person. But due to the fact that the framework of a secular institute does not provide for very close supervision and support, certain physical and moral qualities are needed. It is important for candidates to have a certain amount of maturity, a sense of responsibility, strong personal convictions, good judgment and a well balanced sensitivity. It has often happened, however, that these were present potentially in a candidate and it was only after her admission that they began to develop. A vocation is a grace from God and we feel that, from our viewpoint, we cannot judge whether a person has one or not (unless it is very obvious) unless she has been given a fair chance, unless she has been put to the

test. This test comes during the six months of aspirancy during which time we have a chance to see her in action in everyday circumstances. At the same time it gives her a chance to see whether she can be happy in this way of life forever. Forever does not mean that we take perpetual vows; we do not. First vows are taken after the year and a half of formation. After that they are renewed every year for life. But if the dedication of the Intern and the Extern is to be total and absolute it must include permanency. Therefore, although we renew our vows each year, we must be sufficiently certain that we want to give ourselves to God for life, especially at the fifth year of vows when we are accepted as perpetual members by the authority. Our Founder explains it in this way: "You give yourselves to God for life, but the Church accepts it by slices".

Father Parent is as practical as he is supernatural. In fact, he is the perfect example of what he preaches we should be: persons with our heads in heaven, the Gospel in our hands and our feet on the ground. There are many factors which have helped in the development of the institute in formation. The grace of God is surely the cause; Father Parent is one of the major instruments that God has used.

In 1945 a Bishop had spoken to Father about the great need for a Society that would be capable of penetrating into those environments that were inaccessible to priests and religious. But although the need was there, there was nothing solid on which to base such an organization. In 1947, however, the Apostolic Constitution, *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, came out. Here was something official, definite, concrete. The Church itself was providing the cornerstone on which to build such groups. This is the document that influenced Father Parent very much. By 1952 plans had been outlined for a prospective secular institute, leaders had been found and an invitation from the Most Rev. Romeo Gagnon, Bishop of Edmundston, New Brunswick for an establishment in his diocese had been accepted. On July 2 of that year seven young women who had been directed by Father for a few years went to Grand Falls, N.B. to take charge of a hospital. This was our first foundation. From that time on the development was prodigious. By now the average number of admissions each year is far over one hundred. The large number of nationalities ranging from North and South Americans to French and Laotians, as well as the acceptance of missions in several foreign countries, is proof of the universality of this po-

tential institute that recognizes not only in theory, but more important yet, in practice, the brotherhood of all men in the Mystical Body.

The rapid growth of the Oblates is something that amazes many. As mentioned previously, there are many factors involved in this. One reason that is very evident is that it answers the desires of young women in a very special way. If a person is prepared by God for a certain vocation she will fit in like a glove, to use a trite expression. Surely God has prepared many for this kind of life. How often have we been told by the girls who come to visit us for weekends or for a few weeks: This is exactly what I've been looking for; but I never knew it existed. Most of them end up as candidates. This, of course, is, for them, only a sign of a vocation, not a proof. Proof comes under trial; and many have given their proof. A relatively small percentage has returned home and of course, we are always willing to encourage a person to enter a convent if it seems to be the best thing for her. She could be readmitted with us if she were to realize that she had made a mistake. There isn't much to lose, but there's plenty to gain.

By gain we mean spiritual and apostolic fruits which are won not by a

“getting” but by a “giving”. This gain can be won only by loving and no one loves unless one gives. As Oblates we are asked to love so much that we will never, ever exact charity from anyone, but that we will always give it. If we are greedy with the love that God gives us and we keep it jealously to ourselves its sparks will be imprisoned by our own will and they will never reach those cinders that are burning out, those cinders which, in our moment of zeal, we yearned so much to enkindle and set aflame. There are no bargains in the apostolic life. The cost is the highest—our complete self. Christ Himself has shown us that by His own Life-Passion-Death. But if the cost is great, the fruits are worth infinitely more, for they are immortal souls who will praise God eternally. Cinders are dying out. . . What are you doing to enkindle them?

For further information about the O.M.M.I.'s, write to one of the following addresses :

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Constance Lemonde O. M. M. I.

Miss Constance Lemonde, o.m.i. was born in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. After leaving St. Clare High School she worked in a couple of offices and then became secretary to the director of Catholic Charities in Woonsocket. In 1954 she

made a retreat with the Oblates. A year later she became an Intern and was stationed in Lowell, Massachusetts before she was transferred to the Pilgrim's House, a hotel for pilgrims at Our Lady of the Cape Shrine in Canada. Presently she is working in Richfield, Minnesota where she is directress of that training center.



CHALLENGE ACCEPTED:

Although Secular Institutes have been established by the Church since 1947 when Pope Pius XII issued the Apostolic Constitution "Provida Mater Ecclesia", they are still very little known to the general public. Even less known are the institutes themselves. Therefore, not only does this booklet give you answers to various non-technical questions about this new form of dedicated life, but, more important yet, it gives you an insight into a real secular institute in formation, the Oblate Missionaries of the Immaculate, whose members are now serving the Church in several foreign countries as well as in the United States and Canada.

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